

THE HOUSE
OF USNA



1881
USNA
USNA

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THE HOUSE OF USNA

The House of Usna

A DRAMA BY
FIONA MACLEOD

PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCCIII

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THOMAS B. MOSHER
1903

TO
MONA

FOREWORD

FOREWORD



IN this short drama I have attempted to give voice to two elemental emotions, the emotion of the inevitableness of destiny and the emotion of tragical loveliness. One does not need to know the story of Concobar and Deirdrê, of Deirdrê and the Sons of Usna, in order to know the mystery and the silent arrivals of destiny, or to know the emotion of sorrow at the passage of beauty: as one does not need to know the story of *Iphigeneia in Aulis* in order to know the emotion of indignation at kingly guile or the emotion of pity for the betrayed: as one does not need to know the story of the *Crowned Hippolytos* in order to know the emotion of tragical suspense, as when Phaedra's love for the son of her husband is like a leaf on the wind; or in order to know the emotion of

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bewildered futility, as when Theseus curses and banishes his innocent son and persuades to him the doom of Poseidon. For these emotions are not the properties of drama, which is but a fowler snaring them in a net. These deep elementals are the obscure Chorus which plays upon the silent flutes, upon the nerves wherein the soul sits enmeshed. They have their own savage or divine energy, and the man of the woods and the dark girl of the canebrakes know them with the same bowed suspense or uplifted lamentation or joy as do the men and women who have great names and to whom the lords of the imagination have given immortality.

Many kings have desired, and the gods forbidden. Concobar has but lain down where Cæsars have fallen and Pharaohs closed imperial eyes, and many satraps and many tyrants have bent before the wind. All old

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men who in strength and passion rise up against the bitterness of destiny are the kindred of Lear: those who have kept love as the crown of years, and seen it go from them like a wreath of sand, are of the kin of Concobar. There is not one Lear only, or one Concobar, in the vast stage of life: but a multitude of men who ask, in the dark hour of the Winged Destiny, *Am I in truth a king?* or who, incredulous, whisper *Deirdré is dead, Deirdré the beautiful is dead, is dead.*

The tradition of accursed families is not the fantasy of one dramatist or of one country or of one time. The *Oresteia* of Aischylos is no more than a tragic fugue wherein one hears the cries of uncountable threnodies. The doom of the clan of Usna is not less veiled in terror and perpetuated in fatality than the doom of the Atreidae: and even 'The Fall of the House of Usher' is but a single note of the same

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ancient mystery over which Sophocles brooded in the lamentations which eddy like mournful winds around the House of Labdacus.

Whether the poet turn to the tragedy of the Theban dynasty wherein Laios and Iokaste and Oidipus move like children of fire in a wood doomed to flame; or to the tragedy of the Achaian dynasty, wherein Pelops and Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaos, Helen and Iphigeneia, Klytaimestra prophesying and the prophet Kalchas, are like shadowy figures, crowned with terror and beauty, on the verge of a dark sea where the menace of an obscure wind is continually heard beyond the enchanted shore; or to the tragedy of Lear weeping, where all kingship seems as a crown left in the desert to become the spoil of the adder or a pillow for wandering dust; or to the Celtic tragedy of the House of Fionn, where Dermid and Grania,

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where Oisín and Malveen, are like the winds and the waters, the rains and the lamentations of the hills; or to that other and less familiar gaelic tragedy of the House of Usna, where an old king knows madness because of garnered love spilt and wasted, and where a lamp of deathless beauty shines like a beacon, and where heroes die as leaves fall, and where a wind of prophesying is like the sound of dark birds flying over dark trees in the darkness of forgotten woods:—whether one turn to these, or to the doom of the House of Malatesta, or to the doom of the House of Macbeth, or to the doom of the House of Ravenswood, one turns in vain if he be blind and deaf to the same elemental forces as they move their eternal ichor through the blood that has to-day's warmth in it, that are the same powers though they be known of the obscure and the silent, and are committed like

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wandering flame to the torch of a ballad as well as to the starry march of the compelling words of genius ; are of the same dominion, though that be in the shaken hearts of islesfolk and mountaineers, and not with kings in Mykênai, or by the thrones of Tamburlaine and Aurungzebe, or with great lords and broken nobles and thanes.

But the poet, the dramatist, is not able—is not yet able—to express in beauty and convey in symbol the visible energy of these emotions without resort to the artifice of men and women set in array, with harmonious and arbitrary speech given to them, and a background of illusion made unreal by being made emphatic.

If one were to express the passion of remorse under the signal of a Voice lamenting, or the passion of tears under the signal of a Cry, and be content to give no name to these

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protagonists and to deny them the background of history or legend : and were to unite them in the sequence of significant and essential things which is drama in action, but in a sequence of suggestion and symbol rather than of statement and pageant : he would be told that he had mistaken the method of music passing into drama for the method of verbal illusion passing into drama.

And, while this is so, it cannot be gainsaid that he must not seek to disengage from the creature of his imagination these old allies, the intimate name and the familiar circumstance. It may be true that a Voice and a Cry may suffice, not as choric echo or emphasis, but as protagonists in a drama where the passions and energies and unveiled emotions are unloosed, and elemental strives with elemental, till Love and Terror may in very weariness lie down

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together, and Death and Sorrow and Wrath and Lamentation disclose their own august nakedness, beings standing apart from the mortal wrappings of words and action, of silence and sound and colour and shape, to which our mind compels them. But that is too subtle a dream for realisation to seem possible yet. It is too subtle perhaps even as the insubstantial phantom of a dream, save for those who, hungering after the wild honey of the mind and thirsting for the remoter springs, foresee a time when the imagination shall lay aside words and pigments and clay, as raiment needless during the festivals of the spirit, and express itself in the thoughts which inhabit words — as light inhabits water or as greenness inhabits grass; and in the colours which inhabit pigments, as wild-roses and dew-wet laburnum and white and purple iris gathered from a June morning and

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hidden in earthenware jars; and in the perpetual and protean energy of Form which, tranced and unique, dreams in clay or sleeps in marble or ivory.

But so long as the imagination dwells in this old convention which imposes upon us the use of events that chime to the bells of the past, and the use of names which are at once congruous and traditional in this convention of episode and phrase in the concert of action and suspense it will be well ever and again to turn to those ancestral themes past which so many generations have slipt like sea-going winds over pastures, and upon which the thoughts of many minds have fallen in secret dews. I do not say, for I do not so think, that there might not be drama as moving whether it deal with the event of to-day and the accent of the hour as with a remote accent recovered and with remote

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event. Some of the dramas of Browning, some of the finer French dramas, some of the short plays of Mr. Yeats and others, are to the point. But, to many minds, there must always be a supreme attraction in great themes of drama as familiar to us as the tales of faerie and wonder to the mind of childhood. The mind, however, need not be bondager to formal tradition. I know one who can evoke modern dramatic scenes by the mere iterance of the great musical names of the imagination . . . Menelaos, Helen, Klytemaistra, Andromachê, Kassandra, Orestes, Blind Oidipus, Elektra, Kreusa, and the like. This is not because these names are in themselves esoteric symbols, or are built of letters of revelation as the fabled tower of Ys was built of evocatory letters made of wind and water, of brownness of earth, of greenness of grass, and of dew, all of which the druids held in the

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hollows of the five vowels. My friend has not seen any representation of the *Agamemnon* or the *Choephoroi*, of *Aias* or *Oidipus at Kolonos*, of *Elektra* or *Ion*, or indeed of any Greek play. But he knows the story of every name mentioned in each of the dramas of the three kings of Greek Tragedy. So, as he says, why should he go out to see a trivial play of trivial people animated by trivial emotions against a background of trivial circumstance, when he can sit before his fire and see Elektra and Orestes standing appalled before the dead body of Klytaimestra, listening if the coming steps are the steps of murdered Aigisthos, and cowering when they see the pale immortal faces of the Dioskoroi: or see Oidipus, that proud king, when he hears the first terrible whisper of destiny from the lips of the prophet Teiresias, or when, blind and abased, he lies in the dust, with

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Iokaste, wife and queen and revealed mother, already 'a silent fruit on the tree of death,' while, beyond, the Choros raves: or when, as in *Aias*, (as our Cuchulain fighting the waves with drawn sword and foam on his lips, or Conchobar in the legendary tale that on the day of the Crucifixion he ran into the woods lopping great branches from the trees and calling 'A king is fallen to-day, an innocent king is slain, a great king is fallen!') the mad prince runs among a herd of cattle and slaughters the lowing bulls, thinking them to be Agamemnon and Menelaos — or, later, when he stands subtly smiling as though acquiescing to the fair words of Tek-messa, and then with sidelong eyes goes furtively to the solitary place where he may fall upon his sword? Or, again, he may see Klytaimestra entering the doorway, with Elektra and Orestes waiting with beating hearts,

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not as either Euripides or Aischylos has revealed to us ; or may see Oidipus staring with sudden scornful wrath at Teiresias, not as either Aischylos or Sophocles has revealed to us ; but a Klytaimestra, an Elektra, an Orestes, an Oidipus, a Teiresias, as revealed to his own vision that is of to-day, shaped from the mould that moulds the spirit of to-day and coloured with the colour of to-day's mind. And here, he says, is his delight. "For I do not live only in the past, but in the present, in these dramas of the mind. The names stand for the elemental passions, and I can come to them through my own gates of to-day as well as through the ancient portals of Aischylos or Sophocles or Euripides : and for background I prefer the flame-light and the sound of the wind to any of the crude illusions of stagecraft."

It is no doubt in this attitude that Racine, so French in the accent of his

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classical genius, looked at the old drama which was his inspiration : that Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Bridges, so English in the accent of their genius, have looked at it ; that Etchegaray, in Spain, looked at it before he produced his troubled modern *Elektra* which is so remote in shapen thought and coloured semblance from the colour and idea of its prototype ; that Gabriele D'Annunzio looked at it before he became obsessed with the old terrible idea of the tangled feet of Destiny, so that a tuft of grass might withhold or a breath from stirred dust empoison, and wrote that most perturbing of all modern dramas, *La Città Morta*.

It concurs, then, that there is no inherent reason why a poet of to-day should not overtake the same themes as Aischylos overtook from Phrynicus, and Sophocles from Aischylos, and Euripides from all three, and Philoclês and Agathôn and Xenoclês indiscrim-

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inately. The difficulty is not in the remoteness of the theme, still less in the essential substance. It is in the mistaken idea that the ancient formal method is inevitable, and in the mistaken idea that a theme sustained on essential and elemental things and therefore independent of unique circumstance can be exhausted by the flashing upon it of one great light. *Kassandra and Helen and Iphigeneia* . . . they live: they are not dead. But, to approach them, to come face to face with them, that is not the reward of the most eager mind, or of the most uplifted desire: it is the reward only of genius akin in quality at least with that of those great ones of old who, like drifting *Pharos*, flashed across the dark seas of antiquity a dazzling illumination on this lifted wave called *Helen*, on that lifted wave called *Andrômachê*, on these long rolling billows called *Ag-*

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memnon or Aias or Orestes. It is not the themes that have receded but the imaginations that have quailed.

Merely to parody the Greek tragedians, by taking a great theme and putting one's presumption and weakness beside it—that is another thing altogether. It is difficult after Shelley and Robert Browning, after Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Robert Bridges, to say that no modern English poet has achieved a play with a Greek heart . . . no play written as a nineteenth century Sophocles or Euripides or Agathôn would have written it. Even on *Prometheus Unbound* and *Atalanta in Calydon*, even on *Erechtheus*, the Gothic genius of the North has laid a touch as delicate as frost, as durable as the finger of primeval fire on the brows of immemorial rock. Perhaps the plays of Mr. Bridges are more truly classical than any modern drama since Racine. But their flame

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is flame seen in a mirror : we see the glow, we are intellectually warmed by it, but we do not feel it our minds only, not our hearts that should burn, our nerves that should thrill, respond.

The reason, I do not doubt, is mainly a psychical rather than an intellectual difficulty. It is the indwelling spirit and not the magnetic mind that is wayward and eager to evade the compelling wand of the imagination. For the spirit is not under the spell of tradition. It wishes to go its own way. Tradition says, if you would write of the slaying of Klytaimestra you must present a recognisable Elektra and a recognisable Orestes, and Dioskoroi recognisable as Dioskoroi against a recognisable background : but to the spirit Elektra and Orestes are simply abstract terms of the theatre of the imagination, the Dioskoroi are august

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powers, winnowers of fate, and the old Greek background is but a remembered semblance of a living stage that is not to-day what it was yesterday or shall be to-morrow, and yet is ever in essentials the same.

There is not one of the Greek dramas which might not in spiritual identity be achieved to-day by genius that, with equality of power, could perceive the intransiency of the essential and immortal factors in the life of the imagination and the mutability of what is accidental in time and circumstance.

We are, I believe, turning towards a new theatre. The theatre of Ibsen, and all it stands for, is become outworn as a compelling influence. Its inherent tendency to demonstrate intellectually from a series of incontrovertible material facts is not adequate for those who would see in the drama the means to demonstrate sym-

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bolically from a sequence of intuitive perception. A subtle French critic, writing of the theatre of Ibsen, appreciates it as a theatre more negative than positive, more revolutionary than foundational, more intellectual than religious. "À ce théâtre amer et sec," he adds, "l'âme moderne ne peut étancher toutes ses soifs d'infini et d'absolu."

I think that, there, the right thing is said, as well as the significant indication given. "More intellectual than religious": that is, more congruous with the method of the mirror that gathers and reveals certain facets of the spirit, than with the spirit who as in a glass darkly looks into the mirror. "More intellectual than religious": that is, more persuaded by the sight that reveals the visible than by the vision that perceives what materially is not visible. 'At this bitter and dry theatre of the intellect,

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the modern soul cannot quench its thirst for the infinite and absolute': and that is the reason, alone adequate, why to-day the minds of men are turning to a new drama, wherein thoughts and ideas and intuitions shall play a more significant part than the acted similitudes of the lesser emotions that are not so much the incalculable life of the soul as the conditioned energies of the body. The Psychic drama shall not be less nervous: but the emotional energy shall be along the nerves of the spirit, which sees beneath and above and beyond, rather than merely along the nerves of material life, which sees only that which is in the line of sight.

And as I have written elsewhere, it may well be that, in a day of outworn conventions, many of us are ready to turn gladly from the scenic illusions of the stage-carpenter and the palpable illusions of the playwright, to the

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ever-new illusions of the dreaming mind, woven in a new intense dramatic reality against 'imagined tapestries'

*. . . . dream-coloured dramas of the mind
Best seen against imagined tapestries*

against revealing shadows and tragic glooms and radiances as real, and as near, as the crude symbols of painted boards and stereotyped phrase in which we still have a receding pleasure.

I think the profoundest utterance I know, witnessing to the fundamentally psychical nature of the drama, is a phrase of Chateaubriand which I came upon recently in Book V. of his *Mémoires* "to recover the desert I took refuge in the theatre." The whole effort of a civilisation become anæmic and disillusioned must be to 'recover the desert.' That is a central truth, perceived now of many who are still the few. This great writer knew that in the *théâtre de l'âme*

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lay the subtlest and most searching means for the imagination to compel reality to dreams, to compel actuality to vision, to compel to the symbolic congregation of words the bewildered throng of wandering and illusive thoughts and ideas. By 'the desert' he meant that wilderness, that actual or symbolic solitude, to which the creative imagination goes as the curlew to the wastes or as the mew to foam and wind.

Other writers speak of 'nature' and 'solitude' as though regarding them as sanctuaries where the passions may, like the wild falcons, cover their faces with their wings, and be still. Chateaubriand was of those few who look upon the solitudes of nature as enchanted lands, where terror walks with beauty, and where dreams start affrighted from quiet pools because the shadow of invisible fear falls past their shadowy hair and they see the

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phantom slipping from depth to depth as a wind-eddy from leaf to leaf. He was of those who looked upon solitude as, of old, anchorites looked upon waste places where the vulture had her eyrie and the hyena wailed and in desolate twilights the lioness filled the dark with the hunger of her young. "Be upon your guard against solitude : the great passions are solitary, and to transport them to the desert is to restore them to their triumph."

But I have wandered from the narrower path on which I set out. Elsewhere, I hope to express more adequately what here I have cursorily outlined, and, also, tentatively to illustrate the Psychic Drama as thus indicated. It is because my mind is occupied with many problems of a new drama that I have thus burdened a mere act, remembered as it were from some vast unwritten ancient drama, with so lengthy a preface.

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However, it may stand as the statement of a movement of return on the part of individual thought, that I believe to be indicative of a movement of return on the part of modern thought, to the instinct of organic unity and in the deep sense of the term . . . to a religious inspiration.

F. M.

THE HOUSE OF USNA:
A DRAMA

NOTE



CONCOBAR MAC NESSA was King of Ulster and Ard-Ree or High-King of Ireland at the beginning of the Christian era. By some chroniclers his reign is said to be synchronous with the mortal years of Christ.

Concobar had founded the knightly order of "The Red Branch"—the forerunner, though on a more epical scale, of the Round Table of the Arthurian Chivalry—and by his force of will and the power of his nation (the Ultonians, the people of Uladh, or Ulster) had become not only High-King of Ireland, but dreamed to make of its nations one nation, and that he and his sons and his son's sons should be its kings. In this he disregarded both the

NOTE

prophecies of the seers and the will of the gods ; for he had long schemed, and at last accomplished, a deed of evil and treachery upon three of the champions of the Alban or Scottish Gael, Naysha (Naois) and his two brothers, the sons of Usna, though the hero Usna had been allied to him and was bond-brother in war and courtesy.

The period of this drama is about four years after the elopement of Deirdrê, as told in the old tale of Deirdrê and the Sons of Usna: a retold version of which, from Gaelic and other sources, has already appeared in the Old World Series of reprints. More explicitly, the actual period is the year following the triumph of Concobar's inveterate hate in his treacherous murder of Naysha (Naois) and his brothers

NOTE

Ailne (Ainnle) and Ardan, because of Naysha's love of Deirdrê (the High-King's ward and most beautiful woman of her time, and by Concobar destined to be his queen, despite the prophecies at her birth) and of Deirdrê's for Naysha. Because of broken kingly honour, and the slaying of the sons of Usna and the death of Deirdrê, Cormac Conlingas, Concobar's son and heir, with other champions, seceded and joined the dread enemy Queen Meave, then advancing against the Ultonian Kingdom from the middle provinces and the west.¹ Conaill Carna and the youthful Setanta [already famous as the Hound (Cù), or

¹ As the names have everywhere been anglicised e. g. Medb or Medbh into Meave, pronounced Mave; and Naois into Naysha . . . I need add only that Cuchulain is pronounced Coohoolin, and Eilidh, Eily.

NOTE

Cuchulain, *the Hound of Chulain*] were among those who in their loyalty remained with Concobar to fight with vain magnificent heroism against the will of the gods.

It is at this juncture that Cormac Conlingas, suddenly deciding to return to Uladh to rejoin Concobar and the Red Branch, is seduced by his great love for the wife of Cravetheen the Harper, and, while with her, is burned to death by Cravetheen.

When the drama opens, Concobar (already, as was presaged, brought to the verge of madness by his thwarted and inconsolable passion for Deirdrê, and by his unkingly and treacherous revenge and its outcome) does not know that this new evil is come upon him and his house and nation, though in truth the end is at hand

NOTE

*when the star of Ireland shall set in
blood from the north to the south
and from the east to the west.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CONCOBAR MAC NESSA. King of Ulster and
High-King of Ireland.

DUACH. A Druid.

COEL. An Old Blind Harper.

CRAVETHEEN. A Harper of the Kingship
of Cònairey Mòr.

MAINÉ. A Boy.

and

ULTONIAN WARRIORS.

UNSEEN: *Mourners passing through the forest with the charred bodies of Cormac Conlingas and Eilidh the Fair.*

Chorus of Harpers.

/

SCENE I

Open glade in a forest of pines and oaks, with the silent fires of sunset on the boles. Confused cries are heard, but as though a long way off. A dishevelled savage figure, clad in deerskin and hide-bound leggings, slips forward furtively from tree to tree. His long dark locks fall about his misshapen shoulders: his left arm is in a sling: in his right hand he carries a spear. He stands at last listening intently.

Starting abruptly he lifts his spear, but slowly lowers it as an old man, blind, clad in a white robe, with flat gold cirque about his waist and an oak-fillet round his head, comes forward leaning on a staff.



COEL.



HO is it who is near me? I hear the quick breath of one who . . . of one who hunts . . . or is hunted.

CRAVETHEEN.

Druid, I am a stranger. Where am I? Tell me your name?

COEL.

I am Coel the Druid . . . Coel the old blind harper.

CRAVETHEEN.

I too am a harper, though I am no druid. I am Cravetheen the Harper. I am warrior and chief harper to the great king Cònairey Mòr. I crave sanctuary, Coel the Harper! I crave sanctuary . . . quick! quick!

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COEL.

From whom?

*The confused cries are louder and
grow louder, then cease.*

CRAVETHEEN (*shaking his
spear*).

From *them*.

COEL.

You are safe here. Tell me this, you who are called Cravetheen: where is Cormac Conlingas, the son of the High-King Concobar? Does he hasten north to the side of his father whom he deserted, because Concobar the king slew the sons of Usna, and because Deirdrê died of that great sorrow, Deirdrê, the wife of Naysha, the pride of the house of Usna?

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CRAVETHEEN (*with savage
mocking*).

Ay, a great king truly, Concobar, the son of Nessa! From childhood he kept the beautiful Deirdrê to be his queen, but Naysha swooped like a hawk and carried her to the north, because each loved each and laughed at the king. And then did the great Concobar track him through Eiré to Alba? No! Did he force the sword upon him, Deirdrê's beloved? No! For three years he lay like a wolf on a hillside staring at a far-off fold . . . and then with smooth words he won Naysha and his two hero-brothers, and the beautiful Deirdrê, and gave kingly warrant to them . . . and then, ha! then was the noise of swords, then were red streams of blood, where the House of Usna fought the fight of

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three heroes against a multitude and their shameful glorious death . . . and then Deirdrê, wonder of the world, did Concobar win her at the last? No! No! She fell dead by the side of him whom she loved, by the body of Naysha, the son of Usna! A true queen, Deirdrê the Beautiful!

COEL (*raising his staff*).

Who are *you*? Who are *you*?
No sanctuary here for the foe of
Concobar the king!

CRAVETHEEN (*with a loud,
wailing, chanting voice*).

I am the voice of the House of
Usna. I am the voice in the wind
crying for ever and ever "Kings
shall lie in the dust: great princes
shall be brought to shame: the
champions of the mighty shall be

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as swordsmen waving reeds, as spearmen spearing the grass, as men pursuing and wooing shadows!" (*A moment's pause.*) Ay, by the sun and wind, Coel the Blind, I am the broken spear of the great gods . . . the spear to slay them that foully slew the sons of Usna . . . the spear to goad to madness Concobar the king!

COEL (*angrily*).

Tell me, mad fool, do you fly from the wrath of Cormac Conlingas, the son of Concobar?

CRAVETHEEN (*laughing mockingly*).

Cormac, the son of Concobar! Cormac Conlingas, Cormac of the Yellow Locks! No, no, old man, I do not fly before the wrath of Cormac the Beautiful! Nor shall

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any man again fly before him, before
Cormac the Beautiful, Cormac the
Prince, Cormac the son of Concobar!

COEL (*eagerly*).

What! is the king's son dead . . .
is he slain?

CRAVETHEEN

(*coming close, and speaking low, in a
changed voice*).

Old man, there was a woman of
my people as beautiful as Deirdrê.
She loved an Ultonian, that had
for name Cormac . . . Cormac Con-
lingas. Cònairey Mòr was fierce
with anger at that, and sent him
away, but against her will, and gave
her to *me*, who loved her, though
she hated me. So I took her to
my Dùn. But this Cormac came
there and found her . . . and I . . .

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oh, I too came back suddenly, and learned that he was there!

A long wailing chant is heard.

COEL.

Hush! What is that?

CRAVETHEEN (*still leaning close, and speaking low*).

That? . . . That is the wailing of those who carry hither to Con-cobar the dead bodies of Cormac his son and Eilidh the Fair. (*Suddenly springing back, and crying loudly.*) For I set fire to the great Dûn, O Coel the Blind, and I laughed when the red flames swept up to where the sleepers lay — and they died, Cormac and Eilidh, to the glad death-song of me, Crave-then the Harper! Two charred logs these mourners carry now — Ah-h-h!

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(As he cries a spear whirls across the stage from left to right, then another, then a third, which strikes the ground at CRAVETHEEN'S feet. Wild cries are heard—a rush—and six or eight Ultonian warriors leap forward, crying as they seize him :)

WARRIORS.

Death to the Harper!—death to Cravetheen the Harper, who has slain the king's son!

SCENE II

In the background, vague in the moonlight, the walls of a great Dùn or ancient fortress, half obscured by trees. To the right, in deep shadow, an oak. CON-COBAR, wrapt in a white robe, with a fillet of gold round his head, leans in silence against the oak. In front, in the moonlight, the boy MAINÉ, clad in a deerskin, lies on the ground, looking towards the king, and playing softly upon a reed with seven holes in it.



CONCOBAR.

USH.

MAINÉ *ceases playing.*



CONCOBAR (*coming slowly forward*).

Where is Deirdrê?

MAINÉ

(*unstirring, plays softly*).

CONCOBAR

(*slowly advancing, till he stands above MAINÉ, and looks down at him, in silence*).

Where is Deirdrê?

MAINÉ

(*taking the reed from his mouth, in a low, prolonged, chanting voice*):

Deirdrê is dead! Deirdrê the Beautiful is dead, is dead!

CONCOBAR.

It is the voice of my dreams.

THE HOUSE OF USNA MAINÉ.

*Deirdrê is dead! Deirdrê the
Beautiful is dead, is dead!*

CONCOBAR (*muttering*).

Duach the Wise. . . . Where is
Duach the Wise? These were his
words: "In the whisper of the leaf
by night, in the first moaning air of
the new wind, in the voice of the
wave, that which has been is told,
that which is to be is known." O
heart of my heart. . . . Deirdrê, my
love, my desire!

MAINÉ

*rises and goes silently over to the oak,
and leans against it, lost in shadow.*

CONCOBAR.

Heart of my heart, Deirdrê!
Love of my love, desire of all
desire — can no voice rise to those
red lips, red as rowans, in that silent

THE HOUSE OF USNA

place? There is no sadness like unto the sadness of the king. Dream of dreams, I trampled all dreams till the hour of my desire, and in that hour you were stolen from me: and in his heart the king was as a swineherd herding swine, a helot, a slave. Was it I who put death upon Naysha the Fair? Was it I who put death upon the sons of Usna? It was not I, by the Sun and the Moon! It was the beauty of Deirdrê. O beauty too great and sore! Deirdrê, love of my love, sorrow of my sorrow, grief of my grief! I am old, because of my sorrow. There is no king so great that he may not perish because of a woman's love. She sleeps: she sleeps: she is not dead! I will go to the grianân, and will cry *Heart o' Beauty, awake! It is I, Concobar*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

the King! She will hear, and she will put white hands through her hair, like white doves going into the shadow of a wood: and I will see her eyes like stars, and her face pale and wonderful as dawn, and her lips like twilight water, and she will sigh, and my heart will be as wind fainting in hot grass, and I will laugh because that I am made king of the world and as the old gods, but greater than they, greater than they, greater than they!

MAINÉ (*chanting slowly
from the shadow*).

*Deirdrê is dead! Deirdrê the
Beautiful is dead, is dead!*

CONCOBAR

*(slowly turning, and looking towards
the shadow whence the sound came).*

Who spoke?

(Silence.)

THE HOUSE OF USNA CONCOBAR.

Who spoke? (*Turning again*):—
It was the pulse of my heart. They
lie who say that Deirdrê is dead.
The sons of Usna are dead. May
the dust of Naysha rot among the
worms of the earth. It was he who
was king, not I! It was he whom
Deirdrê loved — Deirdrê, who was
so fair, the most beautiful of women;
my dream, my love!

A long wailing cry is heard.
CONCOBAR *lifts his head, and listens.*

CONCOBAR.

It is Duach. The Druid has
deep wisdom. I will ask him to
tell me where Deirdrê is. There
is no woman in the world for me
but the daughter of Felim. Her
beauty is more terrible than day to
the creatures of the night; more

THE HOUSE OF USNA

mysterious than night to the winged children of the noon.

The boughs dispart, and a tall, white-haired man, clad in white, with a gold belt, and with a wreath of oak leaves, enters from the left.

DUACH.

Hail, O king!

CONCOBAR.

I heard the howl of the grey wolf, but now you come alone. Where is the wolf?

DUACH.

There was no wolf. It was an image only of your own mind. It was but your own sorrow, O king.

CONCOBAR.

Tell me, Duach, who lives in yonder great Dûn?

THE HOUSE OF USNA DUACH

(looking at the king curiously, then slowly). Concobar the king; with the comrades of the king, and his guards: his harpers and poets; the women of the household.

CONCOBAR.

Can you see the grianân, Duach?

DUACH.

I see the grianân, Concobar mac Nessa.

CONCOBAR.

Nessa. . . yes, I am the son of Nessa. . . . Nessa, who was so fair. Tell me, Duach; in her youth was she so beautiful as the harpers and poets say?

DUACH.

She was so beautiful that few looked at her untroubled. In her

THE HOUSE OF USNA

eyes youths dreamed; old men
looked back. To all men Nessa
was a light and a flame.

CONCOBAR.

Was she fair, as Deirdrê is fair?
Was she beautiful, as Deirdrê is
beautiful?

DUACH.

Deirdrê, whom you have slain, is
dead.

CONCOBAR (*calling*).

Deirdrê, dear love, come! I am
here! I wait!

DUACH.

From that silence where both are,
their names only may come back
like falling dew.

CONCOBAR.

There is none so beautiful as
Deirdrê.

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

She sleeps by Naysha, son of
Usna.

CONCOBAR (*furiously*).

You lie, old man. Naysha is
dead.

DUACH.

She sleeps by Naysha, son of
Usna.

CONCOBAR (*troubled*).

Tell me! When shall she wake?

DUACH.

She shall wake no more.

CONCOBAR.

Speak no lies, Druid. I heard
her laugh a brief while ago. She
came out into the woods at the
rising of the moon.

THE HOUSE OF USNA

DUACH.

She will wake no more.

Silence.

DUACH.

Hearken, Concobar mac Nessa!
That was an evil deed, the slaying
of the sons of Usna. They were
the noblest of all the Gaels of Eri
and Alba.

CONCOBAR (*sullenly*).

They are dead.

DUACH.

They are more to be feared dead
than when their young, sweet,
terrible life was upon them. Their
voices cry for vengeance, and all
men hear. Women whisper.

CONCOBAR.

What do they whisper?

THE HOUSE OF USNA

DUACH.

*"Most fair and beautiful were
the sons of Usna, slain treacherously
by Concobar the High-King."*

CONCOBAR.

What vengeance is called for by
those who cry for an eric?

DUACH.

It is no eric they cry, but the
broken honour of the king.

CONCOBAR.

And what do the young men say?

DUACH.

They say: "*He has slain the image
of our desire.*"

CONCOBAR.

And what is the burthen of the
song the singers sing?

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

*"The beauty of the world is now
as an old song that is sung."*

Silence.

MAINÉ

*(from the shadow of the oak, strikes
a note, and, in a low voice, chants
slowly —*

*Deirdrê is dead! Deirdrê the
Beautiful is dead, is dead!)*

CONCOBAR.

Can dreams have a voice?

DUACH.

They alone speak. It is our
spoken words that are the idle
dreams.

CONCOBAR.

Dreams — dreams. I am sick of
dreams! It is love I long for — my
lost love! my lost love!

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

It is a madness, that love.

CONCOBAR.

Better that madness than all
wisdom.

Silence.

MAINÉ

*(playing a note or two, slowly chants,
from the shadow of the oak —*

*Deirdrê is dead ! Deirdrê the
Beautiful is dead, is dead !)*

CONCOBAR.

Duach, can dreams speak ?

DUACH (*aside*).

The dead, old wisdom, the wind,
dreams — these speak. All else are
troubled murmurs, confused cries,
echoes of echoes.

THE HOUSE OF USNA
CONCOBAR

stands with outstretched arms, staring towards the Dùn.

DUACH.

Death and beauty are in his eyes.

CONCOBAR

with a sudden, passionate gesture, flinging up his arms supplicatingly.

Deirdrê, my queen, my dream, my desire! Death and beauty were in your eyes as a little child, oh, fawn of women, when I lit my dreams at your face before the House of Usna did me that bitter, bitter wrong! . . . that bitter, bitter wrong! O Naysha, more terrible your quiet smile in death than all the armies of Meave! Deirdrê, Deirdrê, death and beauty are in your eyes, my queen, my dream, my desire!

THE HOUSE OF USNA

With a sobbing cry he sinks to his knees, bows his head, and pulls his robe about him.

MAINÉ

*slowly advances from the shadow,
softly playing on his reed-flute.*

DUACH.

Sing!

MAINÉ

(sings):

*Dim face of Beauty haunting all the world,
Fair face of Beauty all too fair to see,
Where the lost stars adown the heavens are
hurled,
There, there alone for thee
May white peace be.*

*For here, where all the dreams of men are
whirled
Like sere, torn leaves of autumn to and fro,
There is no place for thee in all the world,
Who drifted as a star,
Beyond, afar.*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

Beauty, sad face of Beauty, Mystery, Wonder,

What are these dreams to foolish babbling men—

*Who cry with little noises 'neath the thunder
Of ages ground to sand,
To a little sand?*

(CONCOBAR *slowly rises. He turns and looks at MAINÉ.*)

CONCOBAR.

Who made that song?

MAINÉ.

Cormac the Red, the father of my father, and son of Felim the Harper.

CONCOBAR.

Felim! . . . Felim the Harper — it was he who was the father of Deirdrê. He harps no more. (*Turning to DUACH.*) Do you remember when we went to the house of Felim

THE HOUSE OF USNA

the Harper in the days of my youth?
Do you remember the birthnight
of Deirdrê?

DUACH.

Ay.

CONCOBAR.

And the prophecy of Cathba the
Arch-Druid?

DUACH.

Ay: that before his eyes he saw
a sea of blood, and saw it rise and
rise and rise till it overflowed great
straths, and laved the flanks of high
hills, and from the summits of the
mountains poured down upon the
lands of the Gael in a thundering
flood, blood-red, to the blood-red
sea.

CONCOBAR (*troubled, and mov-
ing slowly to and fro*).

Did Cathba see the end?

THE HOUSE OF USNA

DUACH.

He saw the end.

CONCOBAR.

It was but the idle wisdom of a dreamer.

DUACH.

That idle wisdom is the utterance of the gods. The dreamers and poets and seers are their voices.

CONCOBAR.

What were the last words of Cathba the Wise?

DUACH.

That Eiré, the most beautiful of all lands under the sun, should be the saddest of all lands under the sun. Blood shall run in that land till Famine shall make her home there, he said: and tears shall be shed for it in every age: and all wisdom and beauty and hope shall

THE HOUSE OF USNA

grow there: and she shall be a lamp, and then know the darkness of darkness. But before the end she shall be a queenly land again, and the nations shall bow before her as the soul of peoples born anew. For into all the nations of the world, he said, Eiré shall die, but shall live again. She shall be the soul of the nations.

CONCOBAR.

Too many dreams . . . too many dreams?

DUACH.

Cathba saw all that is to be.

CONCOBAR.

If Felim the Harper were to come again. . . .

DUACH.

He would ask: Where is Emain Macha, the royal city, the beautiful

THE HOUSE OF USNA

city? Where are the sons of Usna? Where is Deirdrê, the most beautiful of women? Where is the glory of the Red Branch?

CONCOBAR (*confusedly*).

The Red Branch! . . . The Red Branch! At least, at least, the Red Branch stands!

DUACH.

What of Fergus? . . . what of Cormac Conlingas? They and a third of the Red Branch are gone from you: Fergus, the first champion of Ulla; Cormac Conlingas, the greatest of your sons, the king that is to be!

CONCOBAR.

Conaill Carna is with me . . . and Setanta the wonderful youth, that is called Cuchulain.

THE HOUSE OF USNA

DUACH.

Yet neither they nor the gods
themselves shall in the end prevail.

CONCOBAR (*with sudden
passion*).

Duach, win back to me my son
Cormac, and I will give you what-
soever you will — yea, my kingship.
Him only do I love of all men, him
only, my son who is so fair and
proud and beautiful. He shall be
high-king; he and he only is the
son of my kingdom.

DUACH.

That which is to be, will be.

CONCOBAR (*looking fixedly
at him*).

Shall not Cormac Conlingas be
king after me?

THE HOUSE OF USNA DUACH.

Have you forgotten, O king!
Cormac mac Concobar is in arms
against you. He and Fergus and
a third of the Red Branch are with
Queen Meave, whose armies gather
to overwhelm you, to do to Ulla as
the Great Queen has already done
to Emain Macha, your proud city.

CONCOBAR.

Cormac, my son, my son!

DUACH.

These were the words he sent:
“For that which you did upon
Naysha and the sons of Usna, and
for that shame which you brought
upon Fergus mac Roy, and because
of the beauty of Deirdrê which is
no more in the world because of
you . . . the Sword and Sorrow,
Sorrow and the Sword!”

THE HOUSE OF USNA

CONCOBAR (*angrily and
impatiently*).

I care not! I care not! He shall be king. Listen! Duach; I will send word to Cormac that I am weary of the kingship. He shall be Tanist, with all power. He shall be the Ard-Righ himself. He shall save Eiré. The prophecies of Cathba shall be set at nought. He shall be a great king. All Eiré shall call him king. All the Gaels shall call him Ard-Righ. His son's sons shall reign after him. Ireland shall be made one nation, because of this great king — Cormac, the son of Concobar, the son of Flachtna, kings and sons of kings!

DUACH.

Beware, O Concobar, of the foam of dreams. It is only the great wave that will lift Eiré.

THE HOUSE OF USNA CONCOBAR.

The great wave? Shall not that
be the king?

DUACH.

Through no king can Eiré
become one nation and great, but
only through the kinglihood of her
sons and daughters. In the end,
when all are royal of soul, Eiré shall
be the first of the nations of the
world.

CONCOBAR (*confusedly*).

In the end? . . . In the end?
Of what do you speak? Cormac
shall be king, he and his sons after
him. The blood of the gods is in
Essa, his wife.

DUACH

(*leaning forward, and staring into
the king's face*).

THE HOUSE OF USNA

Essa? . . . Have you not heard?
Essa is dead!

CONCOBAR.

Essa is not dead. I saw her and
Deirdrê and Dectera, my sister,
and my mother Nessa, walking in
the wood at the rising of the moon.

DUACH (*muttering*).

Ay, that might well be. It is the
hour of the dead.

CONCOBAR (*sadly*).

Is she dead, Essa, daughter of
Etain the Wonderful?

DUACH.

She is not dead, being of the
Divine race. But her body lies at
Rath Nessa, where in the dream of
death she can look for ever upon
the Hill of Tara.

THE HOUSE OF USNA CONCOBAR.

Hopes fall about me as old leaves.
(*A pause.*) Nevertheless, I will send
word to Cormac at the camp of
Queen Meave. There shall be no
more war. Cormac Conlingas shall
be king.

DUACH.

Cormac is not there. He is one
of the nine hostages at the Dùn of
Cònairy Mòr, the king of the
Middle Province. Meave marches
against him.

CONCOBAR.

Fergus was king no more because
of Nessa: I am king no more
because of Deirdrê. She is not
here, the beautiful Deirdrê. She
is here no more. I will go into the
woods. I will go into the woods,
and upon the hills. I am led by

THE HOUSE OF USNA

dreams and visions. Deirdrê, my dream and my desire!

DUACH (*aside*).

The prophecy of the sting that was to sting to madness the King of the Ultonians! The gods see far!

CONCOBAR (*starting*).

Who . . . what is that?

DUACH.

I see nothing.

CONCOBAR (*pointing*).

Look! . . . yonder . . . a white hound — a white hound, that moves through the wood! How swift and silent . . . see, his head is low . . . he is on the trail . . . is it Rumac?

AN ECHO IN THE WOODS.

Rumac! Cormac! Cormac!

THE HOUSE OF USNA

CONCOBAR *moves backward a step.*
What! Cormac! . . . Cormac? . . .
my son Cormac!

DUACH
(*staring into the dusk of the woods*).

I see no hound. . . . Where is
the white hound?

CONCOBAR.
Yonder . . . under the oaks . . .
he goes swiftly to the place where
he was born.

DUACH.
Who?

CONCOBAR.
Cormac. Cormac Conlingas, my
son. Is this evil fallen upon me
because of the death of Deirdrê?
Is this evil come upon me out of
the House of Usna?

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

The House of Usna is in the
dust.

CONCOBAR

(distraught, loudly chants).

*The grey wind weeps, the grey wind weeps,
the grey wind weeps ;*

*Dust on her breasts, dust in her eyes, the
grey wind weeps !*

DUACH.

The hound is gone.

CONCOBAR

(putting his finger on his lips).

Hush! do you hear the little
children of the wind . . . rustling
and laughing . . . the little children
of the wind? Or are they the little
white feet of those who come at
dusk? Or are they the waves of
the Moyle . . . tears, tears, sighs,
oh tears, tears, tears, of Deirdrê
upon the dark waters of the Moyle!

THE HOUSE OF USNA DUACH.

Deirdrê is in that far place where
your hound of old is . . . where
Rumac bays against a moon that
does not set or wane.

CONCOBAR (*calling*).

Rumac! Rumac!

ECHO.

Coomac! Coomac!

Cormac, my beautiful son! Cor-
mac! come! come!

*A sound of a harp is heard. Both
start.*

CONCOBAR.

Who comes?

DUACH.

Someone comes through the
wood.

CONCOBAR

(*drawing his sword*). It is Naysha,
son of Usna. Night after night I

THE HOUSE OF USNA

hear him come harping through the woods. Sometimes I see him, standing under an oak. He calls upon Deirdrê.

DUACH.

It is Coel mac Coel, the old blind harper — he who loved Macha the great queen, and was blinded by her because that he loved overmuch. He alone wandered free out of Emain Macha when the beautiful city was laid waste. He is not alone; there are the young bards and minstrels with him. For the last three nights they have come in the darkness, and sung before the Royal Dûn the song which Coel made of Macha and her beautiful city. Hark! They sing now.

The noise of harps and tympan.
From the wood comes the loud
chanting voice of COEL:

THE HOUSE OF USNA

*O, 'tis a good house, and a palace fair,
the Dûn of Macha,
And happy with a great household is
Macha there :*

*Druids she has, and bards, minstrels,
harpers, knights ;
Hosts of servants she has, and wonders
beautiful and rare,
But nought so wonderful and sweet
as her face, queenly fair,
O Macha of the Ruddy Hair !*

*(Choric voices in a loud, swelling
chant) :*

O Macha of the Ruddy Hair !

COEL *chants :*

*The colour of her great Dûn is the shining
whiteness of lime,
And within it are floors strewn with
green rushes and couches white
Soft wondrous silks and blue gold-claspt
mantles and furs
Are there, and jewelled golden cups for
revelry by night :*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

*Thy grianàn of gold and glass is filled -
with sunshine-light,*

*O Macha, queen by day, queen
by night!*

(Choric Voices):

*O Macha, queen by day, queen
by night!*

*Beyond the green portals, and the brown
and red thatch of wings*

*Striped orderly, the wings of innumerable
stricken birds,*

*A wide shining floor reaches from wall
to wall, wondrously carven*

*Out of a sheet of silver, whereon are
graven swords*

*Intricately ablaze: mistress of many
hoards*

Art thou, Macha of few words!

(Choric Voices):

O Macha of few words!

*Fair indeed is thy couch, but fairer still
is thy throne,*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

*A chair it is, all of a blaze of wonderful
yellow gold:*

*There thou sittest, and watchest the
women going to and fro,*

*Each in garments fair and with long
locks twisted fold in fold:*

*With the joy that is in thy house men
would not grow old,*

O Macha, proud, austere, cold.

(Choric Voices):

O Macha, proud, austere, cold.

*Of a surety there is much joy to be had of
thee and thine,*

*There in the song-sweet sunlit bowers in
that place;*

*Wounded men might sink in sleep and
be well content*

*So to sleep, and to dream perchance, and
know no other grace*

*Than to wake and look betimes on thy
proud queenly face,*

O Macha of the Proud Face!

THE HOUSE OF USNA

(Choric Voices):

O Macha of the Proud Face!

*And if there be any here who wish to
know more of this wonder,*

*Go, you will find all as I have shown, as
I have said:*

*From beneath its portico, thatched with
wings of birds blue and yellow,
Reaches a green lawn, where a fount is
fed*

*From crystal and gems: of crystal and
gold each bed*

*In the house of Macha of the
Ruddy Head!*

(Choric Voices):

In the house of Macha of the
Ruddy Head!

*In that great house where Macha the
queen has her pleasaunce*

*There is everything in the whole world
that a man might desire.*

*God is my witness that if I say little it is
for this,*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

*That I am grown faint with wonder, and
can no more admire,*

*But say this only, that I live and die in
the fire*

*Of thine eyes, O Macha, my
desire,*

With thine eyes of fire!

*(Choric Voices in a loud swelling
chant):*

*But say this only, that we live
and die in the fire*

*Of thine eyes, O Macha, Dream,
Desire,*

With thine eyes of fire!

*(Choric Voices repeat their refrains,
but fainter, and becoming more
faint. Last vanishing sound
of the harps and tympani.)*

CONCOBAR.

*Is Emain Macha as a dream that
is no more?*

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

Emain Macha, the beautiful city,
is as a dream that is no more.

A moan of wind.

CONCOBAR.

Wind, wind, nothing but wind !

DUACH.

Clouds cover the moon. Let us
go, O king. To-night, dreams : the
morrow waits, when dreams will be
realities.

CONCOBAR.

Dreams, dreams, nothing but
dreams !

*(Slowly CONCOBAR and DUACH pass
through the darkening gloom.
The Dûn becomes more and
more obscure. From the dark-
ness to the right a single flute
note, where MAINÉ lies.)*

THE HOUSE OF USNA
MAINÉ

(chanting slowly, unseen). Deirdrê
is dead! Deirdrê the Beautiful is
dead, is dead!

SCENE III

Scene, the same. Ultonian Warriors have brought CRAVETHEEN THE HARPER — a misshapen savage figure, held by two warriors — before the king, so that CONCOBAR may decree what manner of death the man is to die, because of having murdered CORMAC by setting fire to the Dùn, where he and EILIDH lay, and burning him and his love, and all that were within the Dùn.



CONCOBAR.



HAVE heard all. Let
him go. What is death?

(CRAVETHEEN *is*
released.)

CRAVETHEEN.

Have you no mercy, O king?

CONCOBAR.

Harper, you have your life. Go!

CRAVETHEEN.

Have you no mercy, O king?

CONCOBAR.

What is your desire?

CRAVETHEEN.

I have but one desire, Concoabar,
King of Ulla.

CONCOBAR.

Speak.

THE HOUSE OF USNA
CRAVETHEEN.

It is that I may know death.

CONCOBAR

(rising, and smiling strangely).
Brother, I too—I too have that
one desire.

CRAVETHEEN *(confusedly)*.

You . . . the king. . . .

MAINÉ

*lying under an oak, makes a clear
note on his reed-flute, and chants
slowly, with wailing rise and fall:*

*Deirdrê is dead! Deirdrê the
Beautiful is dead, is dead!*

CRAVETHEEN *(muttering)*.

Ah, now I know! Now I know!
(moving slowly towards the king).
That cry is the cry of the House of
Usna! The gods do not sleep, O

THE HOUSE OF USNA

king. That cry is the cry of the House of Usna!

CONCOBAR

with sudden fury, reaching out his arms as though cursing or abhorring the speaker. Take him away! To death! . . . to death! Away with him!

CRAVETHEEN

(eagerly and triumphantly). I am the voice of the House of Usna, O king!

CONCOBAR *(furiously).*

Tie him to the saplings! Let him die the death of the oaks!

WARRIORS *(shouting).*

To the Death-tree! To the Death-tree!

(They seize CRAVETHEEN, and drag him away into the wood.)

THE HOUSE OF USNA
CONCOBAR

(staring about him confusedly).
Who spoke? *(Lower, in a hoarse whisper.)* Who spoke?

DUACH.

O king, there is no evil done upon the world that the wind does not bring back to the feet of him who wrought it.

CONCOBAR.

The wind! . . . The wind!

DUACH.

O king, the gods abhor most the evil that is wrought unworthily by the great.

CONCOBAR.

Who are the great? . . . I have lost love, and my kinglihood, and my son, and all, all my hopes. Who are the great?

THE HOUSE OF USNA
DUACH.

O king, you have slain youth,
and love, and beauty.

CONCOBAR

(*wailingly*). Life. . . . Life. . . .
Life for ever slays youth, and love,
and beauty.

DUACH.

Take not the brute law to be the
divine law. O king, are prophecies
idle ways of an idle wind? Long,
long ago it was foretold that evil
would come upon you and your
house because of your uncontrolled
desire, but what avail? Your ears
were deaf.

CONCOBAR.

Why do the gods pursue me?
I am old, I am old.

THE HOUSE OF USNA DUACH.

At the kindling of the light they look into the silent earth, and they behold the slain bodies of Naysha and Ailnê and Ardan, and a shade stands at their grave calling night and day — *I am the House of Usna !*

CONCOBAR.

Druid, is there no evil done upon the world, is there no slaying of young men, is there no falling of heroic names into the dust, save what I have done ?

DUACH.

Because of your desire you slew your kinglihood.

CONCOBAR.

My kinglihood ?

THE HOUSE OF USNA DUACH.

More terrible than the fate of Usna is the fall of royal honour. More terrible than the death of Naysha is the shame put upon those who blindly did your will. More terrible than the death of Deirdrê is the undoing of the great wonder and mystery of beauty. The gods call. . . . "*Concobar, Concobar, thy thirst shall be for shadows, and the rose of thy desire shall be dust within thy mouth!*"

CONCOBAR (*hopelessly*).

It was because of love. . . . It was because of love.

DUACH.

Yes, O king . . . love of thine own love.

Silence.

THE HOUSE OF USNA
CONCOBAR.

Evil can be undone.

DUACH. ,

Where are the sons of Usna?

CONCOBAR.

I tell you, Druid, evil can be
undone. I repent me of my evil. . . .
I repent me of my evil.

DUACH.

Where are the sons of Usna?
Where is the word of the king?
Where is Deirdrê, the too great
beauty of this evil time? Where
is Emain Macha, the beautiful city?
Where is the glory of the Red
Branch? Where is Cormac, Cor-
mac Conlingas, who was to be king?
Where stands Eiré that was to be
one nation?

THE HOUSE OF USNA

CONCOBAR (*in a hoarse
whisper*).

Have all these evils come upon
me because I was a king and
because I loved?

DUACH.

Because you were a king and
chose the unkingly way.

CONCOBAR (*wailingly*).

Good blooms like a flower that has
its day: evil like a weed that endures,
and grows and grows and grows.

DUACH.

But the evil that is done of kings
shall cover the whole land.

CONCOBAR (*starting, and
furiously*).

Enough! Enough, Druid! I
have heard enough. I am the
king (*raising his sword, and look-*

THE HOUSE OF USNA

ing towards the Warriors, shouts).
Ultonians, awake! I am the king.
I am the Red Branch. On the
morrow we march. I shall lead
you, with Conaill Carna and with
Cuchulain. The armies of Queen
Meave shall be scattered like dry
leaves. Fear not the gods! The
gods follow the victorious sword!
Before the new moon all the gods
of the Gael will be on our side!
The Red Branch! The Red Branch!

WARRIORS

*(clashing swords and spears). The
Red Branch! The Red Branch!*

CONCOBAR.

Up with the Sunburst! Up with
the banner of the Sunburst!

WARRIORS.

The Sunburst! The Sunburst!

THE HOUSE OF USNA

CONCOBAR (*triumphantly*).

The gods are with us! (*Lower, and turning to DUACH, exultantly*).

The gods are with us. Druid, it is the will of man that compels the gods, not the gods who compel man.

DUACH

after a momentary pause, and laying his hand on the king's arm. The gods *are* the will of man. For good and for evil the gods *are* the will of man.

CONCOBAR.

Stand back, Druid. I am weary of your subtleties. (*Shouts.*) Warriors, go! On the morrow I shall lead you — I, and Conaill the Victorious, and Cuchulain the greatest champion of Eiré!

THE HOUSE OF USNA
WARRIORS

go, shouting, and after they have gone their voices are heard repeating the acclaim :

*Concobar ! Concobar ! Conaill
Carna ! Cuchulain ! Cuchulain !*

CONCOBAR

(looking sombrely at DUACH). Druid,
go ! I would be alone.

DUACH.

I go. But truly, yea truly, O
king, you shall be alone from this
hour.

CONCOBAR *(scornfully)*.

Enough. I am the king. I have
great dreams. The gods are with
me. They have forgotten, for they
do not long remember the dead !

DUACH

(meaningly, as he moves slowly away).

THE HOUSE OF USNA

The gods neither sleep nor do they forget. (*A pause.*)

A long pause. Silence.

CONCOCAR (*alone, exultantly*).

I am the king. I have great dreams.

*A wailing voice from the wood.
The king starts, raising his sword.*

CONCOBAR.

Who is that? . . . what is that?

CRAVETHEEN

(*unseen, on the Death-tree*). It is I, Cravetheen, in my hour of death.

Silence. The king stands listening. Again a long wailing cry.

CRAVETHEEN.

The gods do not sleep, O king!
. . . Farewell.

Slowly CONCOBAR lowers his sword. It falls with a crash to

THE HOUSE OF USNA

the ground. He stands as though spell-bound.

CONCOBAR

(in an awed whispering voice). It is the cry of the House of Usna !

Silence. Slowly the king lifts his hand to his face, and bows his head.

From the wood the boy MAINÉ breathes three poignant notes on his reed-flute, and chants slowly with long rise and fall :

Deirdrê is dead ! Deirdrê the Beautiful is dead, is dead !

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